BRITISH COLUMBIA'S PUBLIC LIBRARIES: ***A NEW APPROACH***

The Interim Report of the ***New Approaches Ministerial Task Force*** *on Public Libraries*

88-02103/

EC
T6M
D E786
1987
c 2

Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data

British Columbia. New Approaches Task Force
British Columbia's public libraries

Cover title.
ISBN 0-7726-0738-9

1. Public libraries - British Columbia - Administration. 2. Public libraries - British Columbia - Finance. 3. British Columbia. Library Services Branch. I. British Columbia. Ministry of Tourism, Recreation and Culture. II. Title.

Z735.B7B74 1987 025.1'974711 C88-092013-0

NEW APPROACHES

Public Consultation on Public Libraries

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November 30, 1987

Honourable Bill Reid
Minister of Tourism, Recreation
and Culture
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, British Columbia
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Dear Mr. Reid:

The members of the New Approaches Task Force are pleased to present to you for consideration, our Interim Report with recommendations on the provision and delivery of public library service in the Province of British Columbia.

This Interim Report deals with major issues in THREE of the five general areas of consideration that formed part of our overall mandate. Our report represents a consensus of the Task Force based upon the views submitted by local government, public library boards and associations, library staff, the public, background papers and briefings.

We sincerely appreciate the opportunity of being involved and look forward to submitting our final report with detailed and specific recommendations on or before March 30, 1988.

Respectfully submitted,

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MANDATE OF THE NEW APPROACHES TASK FORCE

The New Approaches Task Force was established by the Minister of Tourism, Recreation and Culture at the request of the Union of British Columbia Municipalities and the British Columbia Library Trustees Association to review the provision and delivery of public library service in the Province of British Columbia. The Task Force conducted a process of public consultation to determine areas of concern, and to invite proposals for improvement. Public consultation focused on five major areas: funding, organization and regulation, the Library Services Branch, a provincial resource library, and continuing opportunities for joint development.

PREAMBLE: A NEW APPROACH

The New Approaches Task Force offers its sincere thanks and appreciation to Bill Reid, Minister of Tourism, Recreation and Culture, the Union of British Columbia Municipalities, and the British Columbia Library Trustees Association for the opportunity to review the provision and delivery of public library service in the Province of British Columbia.

During the month of October, the Task Force conducted ten public hearings, and almost 200 briefs and submissions were received. The process of public consultation was positive and productive. We thank everyone who participated, including staff from the Ministry of Tourism, Recreation and Culture, Library Services Branch, whose help and assistance has been particularly valuable.

In our view, public consultation has confirmed that the provision of public library service is a valued and essential service, deserving of local and Provincial government support. We observed a strong sense of pride and commitment in libraries from the public, local governments, library trustees, library administrators, staff, and volunteers.

The high demand for and use of public library service in the Province proves the value of library service as a catalyst for social and economic growth and development.

The New Approaches Task Force recognizes that it is neither practical nor desirable to change the entire provincial public library system. It is appropriate to share our observations with the

Ministry and the library community, and to make recommendations for the future direction and development of public library service in British Columbia.

It is clear that the principal focus for growth and development of the Province's library system must be at the point of service, the local library. We believe that each community should have a library service which is consistent with its size and resources. The quality of local library service should be determined by the residents of each community and there should be ample opportunity for residents to actively participate in the growth and operation of that service.

It is also clear that when libraries get together to combine their resources, the service each of them is able to provide to their communities is substantially improved. This collective will to improve service seems to work well when the initiative comes from the local communities.

Conversely, when the direction comes from a large, autonomous, central organization, disputes over financing, control, and general administrative problems may detract from the result.

Our recommended objective, or "vision", therefore, is to encourage the development of a strong library in each community, and that a co-operative approach be developed amongst all libraries. We believe that this can only be achieved through local commitment and initiative coupled with provincial support, leadership, and co-ordination.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The New Approaches Task Force makes the following recommendations for implementation at the earliest possible date:

PROVINCIAL FUNDING

1. We recommend that the rates for Provincial per capita assistance for the acquisition of library materials be increased by 30 percent to adjust for price increases since the rates were last increased in 1982, and that they be adjusted annually by the annual increase in the Consumer Price Index.

2. We recommend that the Province adopt the 1986 Census as the basis for per capita assistance to public libraries except where the 1986 Census population falls below that of the 1981 Census, in which case the 1981 Census figures shall be applied, consistent with the policy of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs with respect to revenue sharing.

3. We recommend that 25 percent of the per capita assistance provided to libraries serving populations under 2,500 be unconditional.

4a. We recommend that the grant to consolidated public libraries and federated public library systems of $8.50 per square mile, with a floor of $200,000, be retained at its present level.

4b. We further recommend that existing regional library systems not be permitted to expand beyond their current geographic boundaries.

5. We recommend that all formulas for Provincial assistance to public libraries be published annually in British Columbia Public Libraries Statistics.

6. We recommend that municipal public libraries established under Part 3 of the Library Act after April 1, 1988, receive an additional one-time, unconditional establishment grant, equal to the regular per capita grant.

7. We recommend that a fair and equitable portion of the B.C. Lottery Fund be dedicated annually to the public library service of the Province to assist in the development of automation, networking, communications technology, and other special projects of merit.

8. We recommend that the Province negotiate with the Government of Canada for financial assistance for the provision of public library service to people residing on Indian Reserves.

9. We support the proposed amendments to Sections 794-798 inclusive of the Municipal Act dealing with services established within electoral areas in: Proposed Regional District Legislation: a Discussion Paper.

10. We recommend that all public libraries be exempt from Provincial Sales Tax.

11. We recommend that the Province establish a British Columbia Library Trust, similar to the British Columbia Heritage Trust, to receive donations and bequests on behalf of the public libraries of the Province.

12. We recommend that the Library Act be amended to provide for free basic public library service in all public libraries.

LIBRARY SERVICES BRANCH

Large and small public libraries throughout the Province expressed strong support for many of the valuable services offered by the Library Services Branch. It was indicated, however, that some of these services were less important now, and that some could be delivered more effectively by other means.

To accommodate the changing needs of the public library community in the Province, it is necessary to define a new role for the Library Services Branch leading into the 1990s.

1. We recommend that the following existing services be provided by the Library Services Branch on a continuing basis:

    -Audiobook service

    -Multilingual collection

    -Large print collection

    -French language collection

    -Professional collection

2. We recommend that the following services be transitional in nature, to be provided by the Library Services Branch until alternate services or resources become available:

-Open Shelf Library (Books-by-Mail service)

-Book Acquisition Program (book cataloguing and processing service)

-Block loans

3. We recommend that in order to respond to the changing needs of public libraries identified by the Task Force, the following new and expanded programs and services be implemented by the Library Services Branch:

-Trustee orientation and training

-Education and training of library staff

-Development of an inter-library loan network

-Professional and technical advisory support for library trustees and staff

-Province-wide public library promotion, similar to the CounterAttack program

-Funding information

-Secondment of professional staff from public libraries within the Province to assist in local library development

-Federal/Provincial liaison

-Further support for the activities of the British Columbia Library Association and the British Columbia Library Trustees Association

-Enhancement of the British Columbia Public Libraries Statistics, to more accurately reflect the needs of the library community

-Co-ordinating agency for access to all special collections in the Province: university, college, government and public libraries, private collections

We believe that it is no longer necessary for the Library Services Branch to provide multiple collections and services through regional field offices due to modern communications and improved transportation links throughout the Province.

4. We recommend that these collections and services be consolidated.

5. We further recommend that the necessary staff and resources be made available to the Library Services Branch to ensure ongoing delivery of existing and new services throughout the Province.

6. As a condition of consolidation, it is essential that toll-free telecommunication access to the offices of the Library Services Branch be established.

PROVINCIAL RESOURCE LIBRARY

The majority of submissions recommended that no single institution be designated as a Provincial Resource Library. However, there was clear indication of a desire to develop strong regional networks to undertake resource-sharing on a regional basis, and to link regional networks into a Province-wide information and inter-library loan system.

The issues involved in setting up a Province-wide information and inter-library network are complex, however, and require further examination and consultation.

1. We recommend that a consultant be engaged by the Library Services Branch to examine the options and costs of a Province-wide information and inter-library loan telecommunications network linking all public libraries.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

It is the consensus of the New Approaches Task Force that the Library Act requires major revision. It has not been possible in the time available to fully address and make specific recommendations regarding the organizational models currently used to deliver library services in the Province. Nor have we had the time to examine fully continuing opportunities for joint development with other agencies and institutions, both inside and outside the library community.

We appreciate the additional time that has been granted for further input and study and we will develop more detailed and specific recommendations for your consideration in the areas outlined above prior to March 31, 1988.